

# FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

www.freedompress.org.uk

1 DECEMBER 2007

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## YOU CAN KEEP YOUR LCAP ON

A new campaign to improve the lot of homeless people in London has been gathering steam after it was launched by the London Coalition Against Poverty (LCAP).

The group, which was set up in August as a means of providing support to people who are not getting their legal rights through taking on 'direct action casework', identified homelessness as a growing problem in the capital as resources are stripped away from shelter provision.

Matt, a volunteer for LCAP, spoke to *Freedom* in a personal capacity about the group and campaign. He said: "Some people we know who are in advice work in the area tipped us off about 'gatekeeping'."

"This is where the workers in the office, tell people who are legally entitled to help with housing or emergency accommodation that they 'can't help them right now' or prevent them from making a homelessness application and instead redirect them to the council housing list – a joke considering people can be on it for years!

"Sometimes they simply tell people who may well be sleeping rough to come back for an appointment in a week's time – even though they meet at least three of the five tests of homelessness and are therefore entitled to emergency accommodation there and then.

"This has been going on for years and given the lack of investment in any form of social housing, and the destruction of council housing is only going to get worse. Who is responsible? Well obviously we blame capital!"

Practical work has centred around Hackney where LCAP started out, as a project incorporating Haringey Solidarity Group, Solidarity Federation

members, the Advisory Service for Squatters, Hackney Independent, IWW members and supportive workers from CABs and law centres who believe direct action needs to back up peoples' legal rights to make them effective.

Matt added: "We are putting pressure on the individual housing workers to do what their job says they are supposed to, but of course they are under pressure from their management, who are under pressure from Hackney Council – so we are targetting the council and it's cabinet.

"They do have the power to improve things, at the end of the day we don't blame the housing workers themselves, it's the council that makes policy and we are expanding the campaign with the knowledge we have gained through our casework to target the council itself.

"We've already disrupted one meeting with a halloween trick or treat themed picket attended by over fifty people and we will be going down that route more and more."

Other cases taken on so far have included work around debt and bailiff problems in Haringey and even taking on loan shark shops.

The idea was brought over from North America, where the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty has had huge success in reversing years of difficulty in making the state adhere to its responsibilities.

LCAP has already built up a sizeable number of contacts, with over 100 people on a database of potential helpers, including professional law, benefits, housing and employment personnel, but are looking for more help.

While LCAP as an initiative has been organised by anarchists, and is being run on libertarian class struggle lines, it aimed at as wide a sector of



Four homeless polar bears appeared before Bristol Magistrates Court on 14th November, arrested after blockading the Royal Bank of Scotland corporate offices on Avon Street, Bristol, as part of the national day of local action on 15th October called by Rising Tide to highlight the role of the Royal Bank of Scotland in financing the oil and gas industry resulting in climate chaos throughout the world. Polar bears and millions of people are being displaced from their homes by climate related degradation of the environment. The bears pleaded guilty to charges of 'wilfully obstructing the public highway with a non motor vehicle' (i.e. a suitcase) and were given a conditional discharge and each told to pay £15 costs.

the population as possible and includes members with a broad range of politics.

It is also looking to work with workplace organisers, with a sub

group planning a possible 'know your rights' seminar with SolFed and the IWW.

To get in touch, email LCAP at londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.

com, or call 07932 241 737. Help is required both from skilled workers and general hands – free training days are run for people wanting to get involved.

## TAKING STOCK, MOVING FORWARD

Today the British anarchist movement is in better position than it has been for many a year. All the national federations – antifa, Anarchist Federation, Class War and Sol Fed report growing membership. Anarchists are a strong presence in the

resurgent UK IWW. The ABC has reappeared. Local community groups are popping up all over the country. Where I live, in east Kent there is an active anarchist group for the first time for over twenty years. More and more social centres, anarchist student groups and autonomous spaces like Common Ground in Reading are springing up.

Established networks like the Northern Anarchist Network are seeing new people coming to meetings. This year's Mayday march in London saw probably the biggest anarchist presence for a long time. *Black Flag* magazine has reappeared, along with new magazines like *Mayday*. *Freedom*

is stronger and better than it has been for a long time under the current collective. There were a record number of stalls at this year's London Anarchist Bookfair. There were more meetings than ever too. The number of 'serious' books about anarchism from academic publishers are others grows and, of course, anarchism has a strong presence on the internet. Libcom, for example, has over 2,500 registered users. Campaigns influenced by anarchist ideology and organisational thinking, from animal liberation to green campaigns continue to make their presence felt.

The relative strength of the anarchist milieu comes at the time when the

British authoritarian left is, once again, in crisis. Respect has, predictably, ended in tears with the SWP and George Galloway falling out (it's like Trotsky and Stalin all over again). The numerous and never ending attempts to create a new 'workers party' whether through the Socialist Alliance (which limps on) or the *Weekly Worker* led Campaign for a Marxist Party remain the fantasy of a handful of Lenin wannabes. Even where the left gets it together as they did in Scotland with the SSP it all goes horribly wrong. The weakness of the authoritarian left is no surprise to us – anarchists from Bakunin onwards have long pointed out the inherent

problems with such 'red bourgeois' projects.

The social democratic left in the Labour Party and (with a few exceptions) the reformist unions remain impotent and irrelevant to working people.

What is interesting about the recent growth in the anarchist movement is that there has not been an obvious single reason for it. In the past large scale activism like the anti road or anti globalisation campaigns of the 1990s or the anarcho-punk scene in the early '80s specifically introduced people to anarchists and anarchist ideas. There is nothing equivalent to this now.

ISSN 0016-0504



Vol 68 No 23

9 770016 050009

# Home and away

## Emissions Trading Summit disrupted

London Rising Tide have interrupted delegates at the Aviation Emissions Trading Summit, held at Selfridges Hotel, central London. They interrupted proceedings with an impromptu speech and presentation, of a box of atmosphere. Free shares for pre Emissions Trading Scheme atmosphere were also given out to each delegate at the conference.

Protesters from London Rising Tide were at the conference today to highlight the huge risk of accelerated climate change through flights.

This scheme will allow the industry to claim environmental credentials when in fact stopping airport expansion and reducing flights is what is required. The fact that these permits will be auctioned at a bargain price will further add to the lack of impact that this scheme will have on the aviation industry.

ETS is an easy way for the super-polluting aviation industry to cover themselves with greenwash.

The back of the shares to the atmosphere read: "We hereby grant you the right to make great personal profit from the destruction of the human race of which you are a part and from whose existence and misfortune you have benefited greatly.

"We grant you the right to own the air that we breathe and to fill it with carcinogens and greenhouse gases.

"If our government does not subsidise you with a sufficient volume of the air in which to store your pollutants, we grant you the right to buy farming land and natural forest habitats from less fortunate peoples, to evict them from their homes and to replace them with monoculture plantations of eucalyptus and mango. We grant you the good fortune to be too busy making money to find out about the consequences of your actions for your fellow human beings.

"We grant you the right to avoid at all costs the investment of your hard-earned money into technologies free from fossil fuels. We recommend you spend lavishly to lobby government and do not get ahead of the game and out-smart your peers instead by developing safe, carbon-free methods of transport.

"May you forever continue to blame your peers, your shareholders, the passengers, for the decisions you play your part in enacting. May you never think to reduce your flights, to take a positive action, to play your part in averting disaster for your fellow beings.

"Carbon Trading. Not a way to tackle climate change."

## Israeli settlements for sale

Israeli companies are using UK property shows to sell housing in illegal Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank.

At the Israel Property Exhibition at Brent Town Hall in North London, one company, Anglo-Saxon Real Estate, was offering for sale properties in Maale Adumim and Maccabim. Both West Bank settlements lie on the Palestinian side of the so-called green line, the pre-1967 boundary and often cited as the border between Israel and a future Palestinian state.

The Israeli prime minister, Ehud Olmert, and his Palestinian counterpart, Mahmoud Abbas, are expected to meet before the end of the year in Annapolis, in the US, for peace talks that have the backing of the UK government.

Abbas has demanded the Israelis halt all settlement activity and that the

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# Around the world

**BOLIVIA:** Thousands of Bolivian farmers declared themselves in a state of emergency to save the rights granted to them under the new constitution. They have surrounded the Constituent Assembly in Sucre, to protect it from organised opposition gangs working for Bolivia's elites.

The new constitution is aimed at enshrining the rights of the country's indigenous majority and has been prefaced by a rejection of the US sponsored War on Drugs and the nationalisation of key hydrocarbon reserves. The MAS (Movement towards Socialism) headed up by Evo Morales is facing off against US-backed local elites in a conflict which may prove a turning point in Latin American history.

While the majority of Bolivians have been struggling to boot out the neoliberal models of development, the business elites have not been idly sitting by watching their investment portfolios shrink. Where staged protests and political violence haven't worked, opposition politicians have even gone on strike – and now the richest part of the country is threatening to declare independence!

The top 10% of the population own almost half the wealth, whilst 65% of people wallow below the poverty line. One lifeline for farmers was the growing of coca, a millennia-old crop with significant cultural significance. Since the 1970s the US has continually stepped up its eradication programme, entrenching millions in poverty, stopping them from farming the one plant to provide a liveable income. But every

time the US poured Monsanto-made chemicals over the plants, more growers joined the resistance.

The *cocaleros* (coca growers) formed a loose federation of activists headed up by Evo Morales. They most famously clashed with the authorities in the city of Cochabamba, joining other groups to successfully fight off a disastrous water privatisation plan. In December 2005 Morales became the country's first indigenous president, stepping into the parliament building (which would have been illegal not so long ago), with a radical programme of reform that sent a shudder through many a Wall Street boardroom.

Morales and his Movement for the Advancement of Socialism (MAS) came to power on the back of a popular rebellion against neoliberalism. It promises to wrestle back control of the country's resources, enshrine the constitutional rights of the indigenous people (80% of Bolivia's population), give more autonomy to local communities and legalise coca production. More info at [boliviainfoforum.org.uk](http://boliviainfoforum.org.uk)

**THE NETHERLANDS:** Dutch police have arrested a teenager who stole £2,500 worth of virtual furniture from an online hotel.

Authorities said in what was the first case of its kind the 17 year old was arrested after playing Habbo Hotel – an international game and online community with an estimated seven million members.

Habbo Hotel an online community

with an estimated seven million members. The game, which has individual communities in 31 countries and a yearly turnover of £3 million, allows players to create virtual characters, or Habbos. These characters can take their own rooms in the hotel, which they can then decorate with their own furniture. The furniture is purchased with special Habbo credits but the credits are paid for with real money.

The teenager had hacked into the accounts of other Habbo community members and taken their furniture and put it in his own room. He has been charged with hacking and burglary.

A spokesman for Sulake, the company that operates Habbo Hotel, said: "The accused lured victims into handing over their Habbo passwords by creating fake Habbo websites.

"In Habbo, as in many other virtual worlds, scamming for other people's personal information such as user names has been problematic for quite a while.

"We have had much of this scamming going on in many countries but this is the first case where the police have taken legal action."

**SOUTH KOREA:** In Seoul, tens of thousands of workers and farmers clashed with a force of 23,000 riot police intent on preventing unauthorised political demonstrations in the run up to the December presidential elections. Protesters had planned to march on the US embassy to show opposition to a neo-liberal free-trade agreement

between the two countries that was signed last June but has yet to be signed into law by the US Congress.

Demonstrators were also calling for South Korean troops to withdraw from the US-led conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Workers and environmental advocates have consistently opposed free-trade groups saying that they drive wages down and eliminate hard fought worker and environmental protections as barriers to trade.

Many of the protesters who found their march route blocked by hundreds of riot police and 600 buses used long sticks and stones to take their frustrations out on the police and their buses. Police sources said that some 100 protesters were arrested and that more than 10 riot police and some 50 demonstrators were injured.

**SPAIN:** Barcelona Police attempts to disperse an anti-fascist sparked rioting, numerous acts of vandalism as well as violence against the police themselves. Saturday 17th November's demonstration had been called to honour the memory of 16-year-old anti-fascist activist Carlos Javier who was fatally stabbed by an off duty soldier and neo-Nazi in Madrid last week.

Rioters lit garbage bins on fire and attacked the headquarters of the regional interior affairs department. Similar demonstrations were also held in the capital and also ended in violence. In Barcelona ten police officers were injured and seven protesters were arrested.

# Prison news

The prison system is in a "critical situation" and there must be a debate on linking sentencing to the resources available for punishing offenders and the most senior judge in England and Wales, the lord chief justice, has said.

Lord Phillips said recent legislation meant longer prison sentences were being passed but it was unclear to him that the consequences were intended.

It was even less clear that the consequences were calculated and deliberately incurred as giving sound value for money. He said that Parliament must take into consideration the impact of law and order legislation on the money needed for prisons.

"If you decide to lock up one man for a minimum term of 30 years, you are investing £1m or more in punishing him," the lord chief justice said. "That sum could pay for quite a few surgical operations or for a lot of remedial training in some of the schools where the staff are struggling to cope with the problems of trying to teach children who cannot even understand English."

Britain could simply build more prisons, like the state of California, where the cost of keeping people in prison has recently exceeded the state's higher education budget, or it could debate finding some way of linking the sentencing framework to the resources available, he said.

But he told politicians: "Such a debate will be of no avail, indeed it will probably

not be a possibility, unless those taking part are prepared to put to one side the opportunities that this subject always provides for scoring political points and to consider, objectively, what is in the best interests of our society."

Senior British judges have been looking at the experience of some US states which, unlike California, have sentencing commissions. These use computer modelling to link resources to sentencing and have succeeded in shifting funds to community rehabilitation without endangering public safety.

The states with sentencing commissions look at proposed sentencing changes and work out by computer simulation how they would affect the numbers in prison. Most states have reduced overall crime rates by increasing sentences for the most dangerous offenders and expanding options for community-based sentences for low-level crimes.

Delivering a lecture for the Howard League for Penal Reform at the offices of the law firm Clifford Chance in the City, Phillips said prison numbers were projected to rise to 95,000 by 2014.

"We are at present in a critical situation," he said. "The prisons are full to capacity. Prisoners who go to court do not know whether they will return to the same cell, or even the same prison.

In the prisons, cells designed for one person that include a lavatory are being

used by two, but prisons are still being forced literally to close their doors to any further admissions.

"Prisoners are being driven around for hours on end in a desperate search for a prison that can squeeze them in. As often as not 200 or 300 are spending the night in police or court cells. We simply cannot go on like this."

He added: "The scale of sentences is now largely determined by parliament. Where within that scale the facts of a particular offence fall is the judge's task.

"Parliament should, when altering that scale, have regard to the resource implications of the changes that are proposed."

He said the debate should consider "the extent to which resources should be devoted to funding not merely imprisonment, but the other types of sentence now available to the courts, which aim both to punish and to rehabilitate so as to prevent reoffending".

The shadow justice secretary, Nick Herbert, said the comments by Phillips were further evidence that the government had failed to provide sufficient prison places to match demand.

"The lord chief justice is quite right to say that when the sentencing framework is set, the impact on the prison population must be properly taken into account," he said. "This has

simply not happened in the last decade and we are now paying the price, with grossly overcrowded prisons that do not rehabilitate offenders, rising re-conviction rates and panic early-release measures."

The justice secretary, Jack Straw, said: "I welcome this significant speech by the lord chief justice. It makes an important contribution to a matter of great public interest."



# News

## Preserving disorder

### The freedom to protest and the future of SOCPA, the law which currently restricts demonstrations near Parliament

The Home Office has recently published a consultation paper which hints at what was really meant by Gordon Brown's promise to look again at the law which restricts demonstrations near Parliament. Far from repealing this legislation, the consultation indicates that the government wants to extend the restrictions on demonstrations to cover the whole country.

The current law on demonstrations around Parliament bans spontaneous protests, requiring demonstrators to seek advance permission from the police, which allows the police to impose arbitrary limits on numbers and effectively act as political censors.

#### Brown's hollow promise

When Gordon Brown took office in June, press briefings suggested that he would soon respond to criticisms of the law on demonstrations near Parliament. The media lapped this up and dutifully informed readers that Brown "wants to scrap the law that forbids protests outside parliament" (*Guardian*) to "allow Iraq protests" (*The Times*), although others were understandably sceptical.

By the time Brown spoke to Parliament on the 3rd July, this had already become only a vague pledge. A clearer warning of what lay ahead was buried in the grandly titled 'Governance of Britain' Green Paper, published the same day. This suggested that restrictions on protest would be subject to review "to reflect the security situation and allow the business of Parliament to proceed unhindered".

#### The origins of SOCPA

The law controlling demonstrations in Parliament Square, Sections 132-138 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 (SOCPA), is modelled on the powers introduced by the Public Order Act 1986 (POA), particularly Sections 11-12 which relate to all processions (e.g. marches) no matter how small, requiring organisers to give advance notice to the police and allowing a wide range of conditions to be imposed. Section 14 of the Act deals with assemblies (e.g. static demonstrations and pickets) but these do not require advance notice and it allows only a limited set of conditions to be imposed. Originally conditions could only be imposed on a gathering of at least 20, but this was reduced by the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 to a mere two people. Exactly what constitutes an assembly is left up to the police, similarly SOCPA does not define what it means by demonstration, exemplified by its use to prosecute a Parliament Square picnic.

#### The SOCPA consultation

The Green Paper eventually (on 25th October) led to the publication of a consultation document ostensibly concerned with 'Managing Protest Around Parliament' seeking the views of "campaigning non-government organisations; law enforcement agencies; and those with specific business in and around Parliament Square".

However, the first two heavily-loaded questions in the document have no relevance to Parliament Square designated area (since Section 14 of the POA does not apply there):



"Q1: The Government believes peaceful protest is a vital part of a democratic society, and that the police should have powers to manage public assemblies and processions to respond to the potential for disorder. Should the powers generally in relation to marches and assemblies be the same?"

"Q2: Do you agree that the conditions that can be imposed on assemblies and marches should be harmonised?"

As outlined above, the powers on marches were already extended to assemblies near Parliament by SOCPA, because of its claimed 'special character', so now the exception will become the rule. The implication of these proposals

is that any public gathering, anywhere could be criminalised at the sole discretion of any passing policeman unless it had obtained advance permission.

#### What the police want

The police have long regarded public protest as part of a 'spectrum of disorder' which they define as: "Disorder includes any act that is contrary to the general public's perception of normality. Disorder has the potential adversely to affect the status quo and is almost always a predictor of future crime."

The Labour government avoids talk of 'disorder' which suggests a lack of control and prefers to refer to 'anti-social behaviour' which blames the individual, but the underlying assumptions are the same. All of their 'anti-social behaviour' laws are based on Section 5 of the Public Order Act, which criminalised 'disorderly conduct', defined at the discretion of the police, so it is no surprise that the police have applied the full range of 'anti-social behaviour' powers to protesters including dispersal zones, demanding names and addresses, injunctions (EDO/Heathrow), ASBOs, and alcohol-related crime orders.

The SOCPA law was promoted to parliament as a means to rid them of Brian Haw's Parliament Square vigil, and much of the subsequent media coverage, both mainstream and alternative, has concentrated on how it affects him and his supporters. Nothing in the Act itself would actually allow the police to prevent him remaining in fact, since he applied for police permission he serves as an easy example of the government's claimed tolerance of protest.

The police's desire for the SOCPA law is more clearly rooted in other more volatile events including the 'Day X' schoolkids' protests at the beginning of the 2003 Iraq invasion, and most obviously the September 2004 Country-side Alliance pro-hunting demo, which caused them much criticism, not because

the tactics were exceptionally harsh – the Square was eventually cleared that evening by police who were ordered not to carry batons – but because those on the receiving end of police violence were 'respectable' people in the eyes of the press, so they felt they need for a different approach focussing more on control and less on reaction. SOCPA is explicitly referenced in the November 2006 IPCC report on that demonstration.

The Metropolitan Police's subsequent Public Order Review published this April announced that they were seeking "new legislation introducing powers to take pre-emptive action to prevent confrontation".

While much has been done by Mark Thomas and others to publicise the SOCPA restrictions in a variety of ways the police have faced little direct opposition or defiance, and have begun to act as though SOCPA already applies everywhere, such as in recent protests at the Mexican embassy, Canary Wharf, and on Class War's Bash the Rich demo.

#### Their law

What recent right to protest cases, and every law restricting protests since the POA have in common is the false claim that they are a reasonable and rational response to difficult situations in which the freedom to protest has to be balanced against the protection of the 'wider community'. This assumes from the outset that what people believe constitutes their fundamental rights, such as political demonstration or picketing, are inherently against the interests of the wider community. It is with this assumed logic that our supposed rights are contained and suppressed.

A public meeting challenging the new proposal will be held in Room H102 at the London School of Economics, Connaught House, London, on Sunday 2nd December from 2pm until 4pm

## Taking stock, moving forward

Anarchism is standing on its own feet. This is partly as a result of the long term growth in the movement over the last 20 years. We now have solid foundations to build on and an increasing number of people are finding their way to us. The decline and hopeful death of parties like the SWP help. Anarchism has also freed itself of the dead weight of Marxism.

The anarchist movement though remains small. Including the IWW there are less than 400 people in all the national feds. Most anarchists choose not to join any national organisation. However a lack of organisation and focus can create problems and feelings of isolation.

Freedom newspaper's circulation, like most other anarchist publications, sale around 500. Such sales do not though represent lack of interest in the movement's ideas but rather a lack of people who are willing to take publications to local shops that might sell them or to stuff papers into envelopes or flog them on demos. While not as glamorous as going on an action, getting anarchist

ideas out to people is important and quite often that means sticking stamps onto envelopes. There are a lot of anarchists in London yet Freedom struggles to get people to help with distribution. If we are serious about the movement growing, then making sure that it's main and only regular paper goes out on time seems a pretty basic thing we should be making sure happens. Why is it that the movement doesn't manage this, given the almost universal praise for the paper?

Outside of London anarchists across the country are scattered. The eight of us who make up the East Kent Anarchist Group, for example, are spread over six different towns. It could be debated whether the term 'anarchist movement' is even justified given the diversity in thinking and action (or in a number of cases) inaction of those who describe themselves as anarchists. We need to find more ways of getting together and supporting each other. We shouldn't be creating 'front' organisations. As one antifa comrade told me recently, "one of the good about anarchists is that we

are honest. We don't bullshit about the state of things or try to fool people into joining us." We should though be looking at causes that can unite us and the concerns of ordinary people. Working within our communities is important but so is having a national presence.

Anarchism is strong in Britain. It could be stronger. The need for a revolutionary alternative to capitalism is as great as it ever was, maybe greater. The rich are richer than ever. The gap between the well off and poor is bigger than Victorian times. Working class people have fewer education opportunities, end up in shit jobs, have poorer health and die younger than the middle and upper classes. Globally capitalism is destroying the planet.

More than anything we need to debate the way ahead. How do we build the movement? How do we raise the profile of anarchism? Should we be in local groups or members of national federations or both? Should we organise national campaigns or demonstrations? How or should we work with other non anarchist groups?

# French strikes

## Hundreds of thousands more joined the transport and energy strikes last week over pensions and pay

**H**undreds of thousands of health workers, civil servants, printers postal workers and air traffic controllers joined transport and energy strikes last week over pensions and pay.

Thousands joined street protests in Paris, Rouen, Strasbourg, Marseille, Grenoble, Lyon and other cities. The 24-hour strike left many schools closed, hospitals providing a reduced service and newsagents without newspapers. The French capital's two airports and Marseille airport in the south suffered delays and cancellations.

French energy workers, who began a third 24-hour strike on the Monday night, have cut nearly 9% of capacity at nuclear plants, union officials said. Rail and bus workers are on their seventh day of an indefinite stoppage against planned pension cuts.

Finance Minister Christine Lagarde said the dispute was costing France up to 400m euros (£290m) a day.

Half of the country's high-speed TGV trains were operating on Tuesday, while in Paris only one metro train in three was in service and less than half of buses were expected to run. State rail operator SNCF, which is due to hold talks with transport unions on Wednesday, says the number of its workers on strike had fallen since last week. But with traffic gridlock on the capital's roads on Tuesday morning, the stoppage still caused havoc for commuters.

Opinion polls suggest voters back the French leader's plans to reform 'special' pensions which allow transport and utility workers to retire

early, but a majority sympathises with civil servant grievances.

The education ministry said 40% of teachers had walked out but union officials said the figure was more like 60%.

Eight unions representing 5.2 million state employees – around a quarter of the entire workforce – say their spending power has fallen 6% since 2000, though the government disputes that figure.

They also oppose plans to cut 23,000 jobs in 2008, half in education.

Students are continuing to block access to campus buildings in half of the country's 85 universities.

They have been protesting since the start of November over plans to let faculties pursue non-government funding.

Prime Minister Francois Fillon said on Monday the government was ready to talk with unions but insisted it would not budge on plans to overhaul the French economy.

Meanwhile, the main daily newspapers were not available in shops as printing workers struck against planned job cuts.

Students from lycées in Perpignan, Paris and Nantes have mounted protests and there are reports of strikes. In Lyon the occupied campus is holding a coordination meeting today for school students wishing to organise AGs and strikes.

The keyword in current French politics is reform. Both presidential candidates claimed that France needs to modernise to be able to compete on a global level. Surveys showed that most voters identified both Royal and



Cyclists on their way to work in Paris on 14th November – the sign reads 'Stop the strike. I pedal because of the strike and it really bothers me'.

Sarkozy as *candidats de la rupture*, meaning that they represented a break, a break from the traditions of working class militancy and France's revolutionary and socialist past. However most voters did not feel that this rupture was what the country

needed. Sarkozy and his government have decided to roll back every victory won by the working class since the second world war. The new Sarkozy government is launching attacks on virtually every front hitting workers, claimants and students across the board.

The EDF, GDF and Rail-workers are at the forefront of the so-called 'special regimes' for pensions. Workers in certain industries retire on full pension earlier than others. Government propaganda presents this as pampered public sector workers being allowed to retire ten years earlier than those in the public sector. However most of this difference is explained by contrasting extreme examples of workers who have no gone into further education with those who have, as private sector workers only need four more years of contributions to qualify for a pension. To add insult to injury the rail-workers already pay higher social security contributions, so they have actually paid for their pensions.

In the university sector the Pécresse law is a direct attack on teachers and students. Supposedly aimed at giving universities 'autonomy' the aim is in fact to cut financial links and privatise the universities. The introduction of competition between universities will lead to the creation of a two-tier university system. The introduction of tuition fees and the cancelling of less 'marketable' courses. On teacher said

"this is not just a struggle for wages or conditions, we are fighting to defend our discipline itself".

For all public sector workers Sarkozy will permit at most for half of retiring staff to be replaced (in some services this is one in three or less) In addition pay and conditions are also under further attack. Medical interns have already begun striking over measures to force them to work in certain parts of the country.

On top of this Sarkozy is also trying to put an end to the 35-hour week. The country is polarised, with many low-earners thinking reforms will help them or simply jealous of others' better conditions. Sarkozy has deliberately provoked a massive conflict with virtually every opponent possible. Attacking workers as greedy whilst awarding himself a 140% pay rise.

The election of Sarkozy has made the private sector feel more comfortable in pressuring workers, there have been strikes in several sectors over the last few months. Transport, gas and electricity workers have already begun strikes, students have begun to strike and blockade universities and a massive public sector strike is due to begin. Many striking workers and students recognise the need to unite their struggles, calling for a general strike and trying to bridge the division between private and public sector workers.

# Disaster management

**T**he largest category of refugees worldwide is now that of 'environmental refugees' – people displaced by fire, flood, earthquake, cyclone, hurricane, desertification and other effects of ecological imbalance caused by the rich and powerful.

*Freedom* has reported on the increasing number of natural disasters affecting the United States; most recently the recent attempt by FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency; the rough equivalent of the UK's Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms, COBRA) to pass off an event with fake questions and fake reporters (FEMA staff) as a 'press conference'.

Such a response has to be taken in conjunction with what Naomi Klein calls the 'Shock Doctrine' and 'Disaster Capitalism'. These are plans in which not only allow the richest members of society to survive in times of 'unrest', 'disturbance', 'riot' or physical disruption, but actually to

capitalise on it. As in Iraq, New Orleans and Sri Lanka, for example, there is a government-backed corporate swoop-in to impose Chicago School-style, economic changes on a dazed population in the interests of the elite. Massive upheaval and disasters are increasingly being planned for and even created in order to systematically profit from the vulnerability of those experiencing and/or displaced by such changes.

An example of this on a smaller scale emerged during the wildfires which devastated huge areas of Southern California in October. There is a rapidly growing industry moving in on the emergency management field, which has historically been reserved for the state. Most of us are distrustful of state agencies; but we probably recognise that centrally coordinated response to disaster is even less appropriate when placed in the hands of profit-driven, private-sector

companies. But that is precisely what is happening in the United States. One of those last core functions – the management of our safety by fire-fighters, for example – is now increasingly handled by for-profit firms on behalf of the rich and powerful. Analogously, it is to be remembered that there are now more for-profit American mercenaries in Iraq than state soldiers.

After the fires had been put out, images in the media were quite common of a row of burnt homes with one – for no apparent reason – left standing. Of course that was often a trick of the terrain, or the wind. But such discrepancies can also be explained by new moves on the part of insurance companies like AIG (American Insurance Group). It has begun to offer privatised fire response – a VIP concierge service for \$19,000 a year (£10,000).

# Feature

# The great beyond

**Brian Morris examines 'post-structuralist' anarchism and its major thinkers to see if it really is an answer**

There has been much talk these days, mostly among academics, of so-called post-structuralist anarchism. It constitutes, we are informed, a 'new wave' of anarchism which has completely rendered 'obsolete' earlier forms of anarchism.

Earlier class struggle anarchists are thus dismissed as having focussed only on coercive state power, ignoring other forms of oppression; as having an 'essentialist', i.e. a narrow or fixed, conception of human subjectivity; and as having been concerned with 'being' not 'becoming'. The quotes are from the pen of John Moore. Described as an iconoclastic 'thinker' Moore happily combined the advocacy of neo-primitivism, the aristocratic individualism of *Stirner* and Nietzsche, and cultural poetics as a form of insurrection. But the above depiction of an earlier generation of anarchists is of course a complete misrepresentation of their ideas, and is almost a caricature of revolutionary or social anarchism.

An extremely parochial concept, 'post-structuralism' is mainly applied to the theories of a group of elitist intellectuals who belong to what Marshall Berman described as the unprivileged French mandarin caste. The question is: can any of these so-called poststructuralists be fairly described as an 'anarchist'? Let's go through them one by one.

## Pierre Bourdieu.

A fine sociologist Bourdieu was, I'm afraid, essentially an old-fashioned state socialist, and was even an avid supporter of a strong European state. This state, for Bourdieu, would curb the negative social impacts of a rampant neo-liberal capitalism. Though an anti-capitalist, Bourdieu was hardly an anarchist.

## Michel Foucault

He has indeed been described as a neo-anarchist, for he was centrally concerned with the various forms of power that ran alongside, complemented and supported coercive state power – forms he called biopower, disciplinary power, governmentality, pastoral power. But Foucault had such a totalising conception of power that he tended to reduce all knowledge and all social relations to patterns of domination, and he had such an aversion towards the human subject that it is difficult to conceive, as John Zerzan stressed, how any resistance to power might emerge.

Indeed Foucault dismissed anarchists as being rather 'infantile' in their hopes for a better world and in putting faith in human potential. He himself had a rather Hobbesian view of human nature and was essentially a religiously-inclined Nietzschean Marxist. It's

hardly surprising then that Foucault had a fascination for Zen Buddhism and supported Ayatollah Khomeini and reactionary Islamic clerics at the time of the Iranian revolution.

He even excused their oppressive regime by implying that they had a different 'regime of truth' to 'our' own, thus denying the existence of any universal human values. You could defend fascism and chattel slavery on these grounds.

## Jean-François Lyotard

Both Todd May, who coined the phrase 'post structuralist anarchism', and Paul Tremlett (in the pages of *Freedom*) lauded the supposed radical politics of Jean-François Lyotard. A disillusioned Marxist, it was Lyotard who defined postmodernism as a mood or perception that expressed an 'incredulity' towards grand narratives. By which he essentially meant Marxism. This at a time when the ideology of 'neo-liberalism' was being foisted on the world by the agents of capitalism, and the grand narratives of religious fundamentalism were on the upsurge. Influenced by the reactionary philosophies of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, Lyotard ended his days dreaming of inter-galactic travel and supporting the right-wing Giscard D'Estaing in the French presidential election. Hardly the actions of a committed anarchist?

## Jean Baudrillard

Like both Foucault and Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard also eventually lost faith in any form of radical politics. Taking Marx's idea of 'commodity fetishism' to an absolute and ridiculous extreme, he declared that any kind of revolutionary transformation of capitalist society was now impossible.

Why? Because it is no longer possible to make any distinction between the hyperreality presented by the media and the real world.

Production, he argued, no longer has any relevance – all is consumption (tell that to people working in the sweat shops of Asia) and we have to face the fact that there has been the "demise" of both semiotics and the material world. No kidding!

The Gulf War, (Baudrillard informed us in 1991), did not actually take place. Any thought about changing the world is therefore pure nostalgia and all we can do is to sit back and embrace capitalist consumerism hoping that one day it will implode. Such rank pessimism and nihilism and Baudrillard's semiological idealism is a long way from anarchism. He died recently, and in response to an effusive obituary I wrote to the *Times Higher* enquiring whether Baudrillard was a real person or just a part of the hyperreality he theorised!



Clockwise from top left: Jean Baudrillard, Richard Rorty, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Derrida; centre: Michel Foucault

## Jacques Derrida

Derrida has also been interpreted as a linguistic idealist, in famously declaring that there is "nothing beyond the text", although he was later to plead he had been completely "misunderstood". Such pleading, of course, completely undermines his own theory that words have no stable meaning and truth is not one of correspondence.

Derrida's earlier writings were criticised by me – and many others – as being completely divorced from politics, and Todd May admitted that he had clearly articulated political philosophy. Derrida responded to these criticisms by producing the esoteric text *Spectres of Marx* which essentially aimed to demonstrate his concern for social justice and that his own theory of 'deconstruction' was really a form or update of Marxism. Devoid of course of any class analysis and completely ignoring Bakunin's critique of Marx's authoritarian politics. Is Derrida an anarchist? Hardly. He's essentially a radical liberal democrat, though a worthy one.

## Richard Rorty

An admiring fan of Derrida, the neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty has also been described as a post structuralist philosopher. But he's hardly an anarchist. By his own admission he's a literary dilettante, absurdly proclaiming the end of philosophy, and is an outspoken supporter of the American empire.

## Gilles Deleuze

Of all the poststructuralist Gilles Deleuze is perhaps the closest to anarchist thought. Along with Foucault (they formed a mutual admiration society,

promoting each other's work) he is the key figure in Todd May's book on *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*. Yet interestingly Paul Patton's book on Deleuze's politics has no discussion of anarchism at all, either as a social movement or as a political tradition.

Patton does however stress that Deleuze is not a 'romantic anarchist' in that he does not hold that humans have an essential benign nature or that power is simply repressive – notions which Patton misleadingly and ignorantly foists upon so-called 'classical' anarchism. What Deleuze does, of course (which is typical of some academics) is to appropriate – filch – the anarchist critiques of the state, capitalism, representation, the vanguard party (Marxism), without any acknowledgement, and wrap these ideas up in the most scholastic and esoteric jargon – writings that are virtually incomprehensible to ordinary mortals.

Even the well known philosopher Mario Bunge, himself a radical democrat, admitted that he could not make sense of Deleuze's arcane prose. It is significant that Deleuze's most political work *A Thousand Plateaus* (co-authored with another radical democrat Felix Guattari) makes no mention at all of anarchism.

There is thus no mention, let alone any engagement, with the writings of (for example) Proudhon, Reclus, Kropotkin, Goldman, Rucker, Landauer, Bookchin, nor any discussion of anarchism as a political movement actively engaged in struggles for a better world.

Gilles Deleuze, though a materialist, is an old fashioned metaphysical philosopher whose ideas, like those of

Hegel and Heidegger, are expressed in the most obscure and mystifying jargon, which indicate a very mechanistic – machinic – mind set.

Radical social movements that oppose state power are thus 'war machines', social groups are 'social machines' systems of ideas are 'abstract machines' and humans as organic beings are reduced to assemblages of 'desiring machines'.

Capitalism is also a 'desiring machine'. Deleuze's political outlook, though difficult to define, is rather despairing: it attempts to obliterate any form of human agency; offers little in the way of concrete proposals other than vague notions about 'smooth space' 'rhizomatics' 'de-territorialisation' 'lines of flight' or aligning ourselves with some 'nomadic war machines'; and Deleuze seems to insist that any kind of unity or organisation inevitably entails hierarchy or a state form.

As Peter Hallward concludes; for those who seek to change the world or empower its inhabitants Deleuze's esoteric and elitist philosophy has precious little to offer, even if one understands it. In fact, Hallward interprets Deleuze as a kind of contemplative mystic – just like Deleuze's own philosophical heroes Spinoza and Bergson, neither of whom were anarchists. Deleuze's other intellectual hero was Nietzsche who was of course, as Richard Wolin argues, not an anarchist at all but a proto-fascist.

One can but conclude that very few of the French poststructuralist mandarins can really be embraced as anarchists. But they do appeal to budding academic philosophers.

# Commentary

## FREEDOM

Volume 68 Number 23

### Anarchism

Anarchists work towards a society of mutual aid and voluntary co-operation. We reject government, and all forms of exploitation and domination.

Freedom Press is an independent anarchist publisher, founded in 1886. Besides this newspaper, which comes out every two weeks, we produce books on all aspects of anarchist theory and practice – see our website for a full list.

In our building in East London we run Britain's biggest anarchist bookshop and host the Autonomy Club meeting room and the Freedom Hacklab open-access IT space.

Our aim is to explain anarchism more widely and to show that people can work together and use direct action to practically improve our lives and build a better world.

Freedom's editors wish to present a broad range of anarchist thought, and as such the views expressed in the paper are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the editorial collective.

### Angel Alley

Things are moving at the Press as we have a new Bookshop Co-ordinator who is doing fanatastic work to ensure that Freedom Books remains an iconic feature of the international anarchist landscape. Why not find time to come down and check out the ever-increasing range of titles on the shelves?

The paper is perhaps (over)due for a bit of a shake-up and we will be experimenting with a new format in the new year. Now is the time to get in touch with us and let us know what you want to see! Feel free to write, phone or email to tell us what you like, what you don't, and what could be done differently...

And it's that time of year when so many of your subscriptions come up for renewal, so if the address label on the envelope has the number 6823 above your name, it means your subscription runs out with this issue, if it's 6824 it runs out with the next issue, if it's 6901 it runs out with our first issue of 2008, and so on. You can renew by post: 'Subscriptions', Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX, or online.

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### Next issue

The next issue will be dated 15th December 2007 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 6th December. Send articles to us by email to [copy@freedompress.org.uk](mailto:copy@freedompress.org.uk) or by post addressed to The Editors, Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

### Anarchism and the World Bank

Iain McKay (*Freedom*, 17th November) appears to have misread my previous letter (3rd November). My suggestion was not that anarchist ideas have become standard World Bank practice but that the ideas of John Turner, a former *Freedom* contributor, who worked from an anarchist angle have. My source for this is Robert Neuwirth's *Shadow Cities*. The Bank's own views on the regularisation of squatted land (in order to bring it into the market economy) are easily available on their website.

Obviously the World Bank does not promote anarchist ideas. What it does do rather well is to co-opt radical and popular ideas and then twist them to its own agenda.

My letter was meant to be an addition to McKay's article, not a refutation of it. The point that I was attempting to highlight was the danger of ideas which stress autonomy from the state being used by the state / capital to further their own agendas. As Iain rightly points out the means to prevent this is an aggressive politicisation of autonomous action and a systemic critique of capitalism.

Amicably,

London Squatter

### Paranoia or efficiency?

Recently my passport expired and I had reluctantly to head to the passport office for a renewal. On my previous visit, some ten years ago, it was a matter of taking your place amidst lots of people and watching monitor screens waiting for your number to come up.

This time however, it was somewhat different, I arrived and was confronted with an electronic glass door which didn't open as I approached. I stood there making movements in a Chaplinesque fashion in the hope that it would respond and let me in, then I noticed a security guy on the inside pointing to the left of the door. What he was pointing at was a large button which when pressed magically opened the glass doors, through these doors and heading to a second closed glass door only to be greeted my more gesticulations from another security guy on the inside indicating that it was the other glass door on the left

that I should go through.

I was now inside the citadel, and in the presence of two women security guards behind a counter and three male security guards on my side of the counter. One of the women asked if I had any sharp objects, keys, knives, scissors or any other type of sharp objects.

If so I was to put them in the little box plus any mobile phones, then I was beckoned by a male security guard to walk through a scanner, once through I got my keys and mobile back, I didn't have any knives, scissors or any other type of sharp objects.

What is this all in aid of? Are they expecting some terrorist, illegal immigrant, alien, undesirable or whatever they want to call them, to rush in with a knife, scissors or other sharp object demanding a passport?

If it is the suicide bomber that they are worried about, I have no doubt the said psycho would blow himself up as soon as the young woman asked him to hand over his keys, sharp objects, knives, scissor, mobile phone etc, at that point he is already in the building. Perhaps it is protecting the staff from assaults, if so then why not post offices, council offices, benefit offices, rail station ticket offices, chemists, schools, department stores etc?

Perhaps they have these in mind somewhere down the line, along with the thousands of CCTV cameras on 'our' streets, plus a number tattooed on your forearm, a compulsory ID card covers as that, as you can't go anywhere without it.

This is obviously one of the many symptoms of an extremely paranoid governing class, part of an extremely efficient control system instilling fear and obedience devised by the governing class or a combination of both. It has nothing to do with the wellbeing and safety of you and I on the street.

This is the world that we seem to be blindly strolling into, a world of controlled movements, every excursion in to your town or city photographed as you make your way to the bus, the shops, the pub with armed police walking the streets. They will keep telling you that it is all for 'your' protection, but you must realise it is for 'their' protection, they must know what you are up to, who is going on a protest, where and how, who is acting different from the crowd. Only you and I can stop this and take back our world.

ann arky

[www.radicalglasgow.me.uk](http://www.radicalglasgow.me.uk)

### Unsolved crimes

When the criminal (in)justice system released the Birmingham five (four), The Guildford four, The Aldershot pub bombers, and the M62 bomber, a central feature of all cases was again exposed. The unexplained explosive semtex regarded as a governmental explosive remained unexplained. The central question being that the prosecution in none of the cases attempted to explain how the alleged offenders came into possession of the explosive. Indeed a claim that fertilizer explosives were used were attempted. The unanswered question is what anarchists call the semtex chain? In the Birmingham case an attempt was made to link explosive production to the wrongly convicted Maguire family. The non-explanation of the central semtex question and the unexplained chain remained a weakness in the prosecution which took over 20 years to finally collapse the cases! For anarchists not primarily concerned with the wrongly convicted individuals and their compensation payment issues the unanswered semtex question remains the state held smoking gun! The semtex smoking gun issue which some say fundamentally links the crimes to the so call secret services is then left unanswered and passed onto the next wave of terrorist activity so called and new scapegoats. For anarchists the semtex smoking gun remains the central question? With it being a governmental high technology product.

CA

### Disaster management

page 4

The rich who can afford that will get private 'fire-fighters' – in uniform and in fire engines. They will arrive and spray their homes with fire retardant. Some of such private 'fire-fighters' even boasted to local press that they had (also) put out fires. It's tempting to see this belief in being saved as a part of the rapture theory, in which scheme the 'righteous' will be plucked to safety, while the sinners literally burn.

Similarly, during recent hurricane seasons in Florida a new company called HelpJet announced itself with the slogan, 'Turn a disaster into a luxury vacation.' They run a charter air service along what is being called a 'country club model' where customers pay an annual, or one-off

membership, fee. If a hurricane threatens, they get an alert, tell HelpJet where they want to go and are picked up and taken there – as on holiday.

Sovereign Deed (connected to the mercenary firm Triple Canopy) is bigger than HelpJet; it offers 'comprehensive VIP disaster rescue'. They have recently announced plans to set up a fully privatised FEMA in Pellston, northern Michigan. Their website is full of the kind of scare stories about strikes, disease, greedy third-worlders anxious to get their hands on a slice of the American dream, terrorists and 'natural' calamities. For \$50,000 (£26,000) membership and \$15,000 (£8,000) annual fees, members have access to their stockpiled drugs, fuel, water; and – for an extra premium – a VIP rescue in the midst of some sort of unnamed disaster.

Then such systems as Firebreak (Firebreak Spray Systems), which operate in the wealthiest areas in the country, are aiming deliberately to drive up the lowest cost of insurance premiums – in order to 'inspire' others to take out and pay for a greater degree of coverage. One result of this, of course, is that the majority of policy-holders struggle to pay even for regular insurance because of the rising cost of premiums. Instead of directing people's attentions to the ecological causes of the increased frequency and severity of wildfires (climate change, etc), they are offering a stairway-to-heaven for those who can afford it.

Into the minds of many a poorly-informed onlooker will come of course the idea, "What's wrong with someone who's worked hard protecting their family?" But another, even readier, response is beginning to be heard in the media: that those who can't afford combined protection, who were in fact the victims of such events as hurricane Katrina are in some way to blame and should be excluded... "It's up to you to protect yourself. You can't look to the government. Why don't you learn to stand on your own two feet."

Louis Further

### Quiz answers

1. Nowhere. In Jesus' words, it is "easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man enter heaven". Over the centuries, rich Christians have claimed that this was about a gate in Jerusalem that required a camel to be unloaded before it could pass through. The truth is that there never was such a gate, it was an invention of the rich who didn't like to be told they weren't going to heaven.
2. A movement of shack dwellers in South Africa who refuse to participate in party politics or any NGO style professionalisation or individualisation of struggle and instead seeks to build democratic people's power where people live and, to a much lesser extent, where people work.
3. Forensics. He developed the first scientific system for the police to identify criminals, known as anthropometrics. This was discredited in 1903 after two different individuals were identified as the same man.
4. The 25th December. Funny that, Mithracism was one of the main competitors to Christianity in the early centuries of the first millenium.

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# REVIEW

## Richard Alexander is impressed by the power of Horizontalism in Marina Sitrin's new work on Argentina

The events in Argentina on 19th and 20th December 2001, where millions of Argentine people took to the streets to protest against the economic crisis, reverberated around the world. The following weeks saw Presidents come and go, forced from office by popular protest.

Yet those protests were not the first autonomous protests – the *piqueteros* of the unemployed workers movements had been protesting prior to that date, but it took the closure of access to peoples' savings to bring the rest of the country out as even the middle classes were forced to face the reality of precarity in the globalised economy.

Spurred on by the crisis many Argentines declared their total rejection of the state and capital and formed autonomous organisations to both articulate their needs and set about meeting them without mediation and without internal hierarchies. Traditionally one might have thought that people would join revolutionary organisations or unions to do this but the trade unions were largely seen as *part of the system, part of the problem*, and so even in work places they were largely bypassed as workers facing unemployment by the closure of their factories, medical clinics, print works and other workplaces, occupied them and attempted to run them under the control of general assemblies of all concerned.

In the communities there arose the spontaneous creation of neighbourhood assemblies, which met on street corners, again without formal organisation or leaders but with a desire to meet the pressing need for the means to survive in the midst of economic meltdown, which took the form of opening public kitchens, child care, organic gardens and forms of working that enabled a direct relation between producer and consumer.

Other groups squatted empty buildings (even banks) to serve as community centres, where entertainments were

provided alongside education and other useful services, or tried to reclaim land in the case of displaced native communities would have been forced off their lands so Big Business could strip the land of anything profitable. Other forms of autonomous activism were media collectives, including the Argentine Indymedia.

The book is composed of edited transcripts of interviews of participants in these collective organs of struggle, speaking for themselves (not as 'representatives' as they reject representation – including the electoral process), with excerpts from the interviews arranged thematically around key topics, including 'horizontalism' (i.e. organising without hierarchy); 'autogestion' (self-management); 'autonomy' (each organisation stands complete in itself, but they network on an equal basis and co-operate wherever possible); 'creation' (the groups are focussed on providing the answers to their problems themselves, rather than petitioning others); 'power' (moving from power-over to power to do); 'repression' (avoiding co-option or forcible attacks on their independence); 'women' (Argentina was and still is a very macho culture, so the fact that so many of these autonomous groups were set up by women is in itself a challenge to machismo); 'protagonism' (which also deals with the changed way that people relate, behave, think etc as a result of their involvement in the 'movement of movements'). And finally 'dreams' (as Carina says, "It's funny, you know before I was dreaming only about the future, and now I'm dreaming in the present" – page 240).

With a wide range of people interviewed one gets the feeling that the ideas are very widespread in Argentina, but due to the nature of the text (it does not set out to be an objective account of the whole situation) it is difficult for the reader to know just how 'representative' the people in the book are, or how



widespread the occupations and assemblies were. In a way though, that doesn't matter because what is important about this book is the articulation of the ideas and in this respect it is a joy to read. Although I've managed a single quote (above) one could fill a review with quotes from this book, it is that inspirational.

Eagle-eyed readers may have noticed the use of the concept of 'the movement of movements' and it would be correct to say that this book gives credence to the notion of 'the Multitude' as expressed by authors such as Hardt and Negri and Paolo Virno. There is a conscious effort not to collapse all activity and ideas into the stereotypical 'class struggle' concepts, which is not to say that the activists neglect the critique of capital, they do not, but there is no concept of class power, rather there are multiple sites of struggle, multiple forms of struggle, each with its own specificity, none of which can be subsumed into a singularity.

On another level what shines through

the contributions is the generosity of spirit, the emotional warmth, the tolerance for difference and the mutual respect shown by the participants. Quite evidently they have not been passive consumers of their own struggle, they have been totally absorbed by it, because they are in control of it.

Another aspect that becomes apparent is the lack of an end-point for the struggle they are involved in. There is little concern with the 'revolution' as a final settling of accounts, rather they are concerned with the process, 'the walk', the becoming. Many of the participants are looking towards a greater ability of the various organisations/movements to become more self-reliant (ie not dependent on the state or capital) without descending into some form of hippydom.

However it is true that the more they can provide for their immediate material wants themselves the less power over them both capital and the state have, but no amount of self-

reliance in itself prevents the State from attempting to crush the autonomous movements, but despite this they remain optimistic for the future.

Once again AK Press should be congratulated at bringing to the public another well-produced book, one which I have no reservations in saying is required reading for anyone interested not just in events in Argentina, but in the ability of ordinary people to organise their own lives, to develop as human beings in the process and to withstand attempts to force them to accept 'business as usual'.

It will also serve as a more empirically based look at the ideas around 'The Multitude' – although I suspect many anarchists will read much here that is distinctly familiar, even if it is dressed up in a new language.

*Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina*, edited by Marina Sitrin, AK Press, £12.00 (UK) / \$18.95 (US)

## BOOKS

### Attack of the Unsinkable Rubber Ducks

by Christopher Brookmyre  
Little Brown, £11.99

Are you interested in a fantasy/thriller novel which explores the interactive arguments between rationalist and belief-based systems, giving both a fair run (at least at the beginning)? (Later, the author's stance emerges, and there is a clue before the book even starts: a dedication to James Randi and Richard Dawkins). If so, this might be for you.

The premise is that this guy from New Orleans, Gabriel Lafayette, has strange things happen around him. He claims no particular powers and his integrity is reinforced by his self-deprecating manner. However, a reputation builds. He holds occasional

public displays, with still no personal claims. The politics are to establish a Chair of 'Spiritual Science' at a Scottish university – the thin end of the wedge for a raft of paranormal, mystical and religious beliefs. The campaign for 'Intelligent Design' comes to mind.

This is balanced by valid criticism of conventional science, especially the tendency to stick within the current paradigms. Experimental design therefore tends to reinforce this, with selective attention to what you want to find and neglect of anomalous results. If you were a real scientist, you would keep an open mind about pixies at the bottom of the garden.

Along the way, there is an interesting explanation of the tricks of the trade. What they call 'woo'.

To say much more would give away a complex, twisting plot. It takes time to build. It is worth sticking with it.

David Peers

### My First Time. A collection of first punk show stories

by Duncan, Chris  
AK Press, £11.00 (UK)

This is a collection of 40 or so short pieces in which people describe their first live punk show experience. The pieces are overwhelmingly North American in origin and predominantly positive. Most of the punks here went to their first gigs in the 1980s, which means there's only a couple relating to either the first generation of US and British punks from the mid 1970s.

Many of the writers considered themselves to be outcasts amongst

their own contemporaries and families, and the punk scene provided them with a sense of belonging and community. Indeed some are still involved, whilst others have moved on and integrated themselves within the wider community. What this book can't provide is the story for whom punk was not such a success story – those who didn't get out alive.

The book is memorable for a photo of Ramsay Kanaan (founder of AK Press) and his own punk band performing, which is used to illustrate a piece written by his mother describing how her first punk experience was as a bouncer for her son's gig. Much of it though is pretty repetitious and involves getting wasted (apart from the straight-edge types), stage-diving to hardcore bands most

people have never heard of, injuries received and then going to more gigs to do the same.

If I'd have known that they were compiling such a volume I might have been persuaded to tell of my first punk gig at the Lyceum with the Angelic Upstarts and the Skids. But as it was fairly uneventful, so I doubt anyone would be interested. 'Albert Tatlock' anybody?

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# A Sideways Look

Seven and a quarter million families receive child benefit, and all of us were on records lost in transit by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. The records were burned onto a CD and it was lost in the internal post, en route to the National Audit Office. According to HMRC, a junior official broke all the rules by posting them. The records included details of all families in receipt of child benefit, including bank accounts. There was no encryption on the disks; the only form of security was password protection.

The Revenue and Customs were merged a couple of years ago and there have been big job cuts, as well as massive investment in failed computer systems. HMRC has had ten thousand redundancies since the merger. If you've ever worked anywhere where there is constant change and the constant threat of redundancy, you'll know it tends to be quite a demoralising experience. While the full story of what happened at the Washington office near Newcastle has still to come out, the tale of a harassed junior official cutting corners under pressure is plausible. Something that rings even more true is that the most sensitive data was left in because it would have cost more to leave it out! So, we have an IT company charging more for what ought to be a simpler operation, just to leave data out, coupled with management just not thinking things through. Why couldn't this data have been encrypted and transferred, securely, electronically? Or was it because of the auditors' pedantic insistence on a tangible copy, as if it would have made any difference?

Nor is it isolated - HMRC admitted that there had been over 40 other thefts of data this year. If someone with malicious intent, well, more so than the government, gets hold of this data, they will be able to do quite a few things with it. After all, National Insurance numbers, bank account details, addresses and dates of birth are enough to steal an identity.

The big positive from this is that it has driven a coach and horses through Labour's plans for identity cards. Across the political spectrum, politicians have queued up for an easy hit on the government. If data that is held for legitimate reasons (to pay people money) can be lost like this, what about the hundreds of items of data the government is planning to hold in its national ID database? The scheme is already jinxed with the curse of big government IT projects. These invariably go massively over budget, and sometimes never even deliver working systems. But at least the companies who benefit from such largesse are generous to the Labour Party!

Brown and other Labour bigwigs have claimed that the ID card scheme is different, because it uses biometric information (fingerprints and retina scans). A team of mathematicians

earlier this year cracked the way that fingerprints are held on ID cards and used that to fool several fingerprint checking machines. But even if the biometrics worked the way the government and the producers of CSI Miami think, it wouldn't have helped in this case.

There is a tipping point with many campaigns, and I think we are about to reach it with ID cards. The minority who oppose it for political reasons are joined by many, many more who are opposed for more practical reasons. In this case it will be because they don't trust the government not to let their details fall into the hands of spammers offering Viagra, or asking for their bank account details because they are the former director of a bank in Ouagadougou, or even worse criminals. On present form, they're right. Perhaps ID cards will become Labour's Poll Tax?

Svartfrosk

## Imagine if...

Home Secretary Jacqui Smith was furious. Ultimately responsible for the introduction of ID cards from next year, her case was being hugely undermined by the government's loss of 25 million peoples' personal details.

Some naysayers had again starting bringing the cards up and tentatively suggesting that perhaps, putting detailed knowledge of the personal lives of 60 million people in one easily accessible database might not be entirely clever.

This of course missed the point entirely. They weren't talking about a mere 25 million-person database here that was simple to just lose like that. The ID card database would include vast quantities of information stored on every living being in the UK. The scale and security measures would be completely different.

Thousands of people would be logging into this database every day, with access to millions of files at a time with all the information they could ever need to track down whoever they wanted.

Obviously, something on this scale wouldn't just get lost.

Of course, some of the more cynical members of the public were pointing out that the system would not prevent identity thieves, terrorists and fascists from taking jobs with access to the database and either copying or even potentially changing any information they wanted to.

Any system made by people can be cracked by people, these cynics were saying.

How to get around this? Jacqui pondered. She clicked her fingers. Of course! She'd get Darling to say that 'you can be surer of the identity of the person requesting the information' for ID cards, because those people will also be on the database!

Faultless. No-one could possibly disagree with that sort of comprehensive thinking...



page 2

whole West Bank be included in a future Palestinian state. Kim Howells, the British minister for foreign and commonwealth affairs, has described settlement activity as an "obstacle to peace".

The Anglo-Saxon real estate website was today listing 67 new build residential properties in Maale Adumim and six in Maccabim. That they are new properties is particularly significant because it indicates buyers would be contributing to expansion of the settlements.

Maale Adumim forms part of the Israelis' controversial E1 plan, which would see the building of thousands of housing units as well as industrial and tourism zones to connect the settlement with Jerusalem.

The result would be to divide the West Bank, making travel between north and south more onerous and isolating east Jerusalem, according to critics.

Maale Adumim has around 30,000 residents and is already one of the largest settlements in the West Bank. Israel wants to retain it in any future peace agreement.

In answer to a parliamentary question in June, Howells said: "The UK consistently makes clear its view that settlements are illegal under international law and that settlement activity is an obstacle to peace."

He added: "We are concerned by reports of Israeli construction work at E1. The continuing process of establishing settlements is encircling east Jerusalem and breaking up Palestinian territorial contiguity throughout the West Bank."

"These practices fuel Palestinian anger, threaten to cut east Jerusalem off from the West Bank and undermine the prospect for a viable Palestinian state."

## Listings

2nd December 30th anniversary of Animal Aid's Christmas Without Cruelty Fair, at Kensington Town Hall, Hornton Street, London, from 10am

2nd December Public meeting to plan a response to the proposal to extend the current restrictions on demonstrations near Parliament to cover the whole country - Room H102 at the London School of Economics, Connaught House, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, from 2pm until 4pm, for more see stateofemergency.org.uk

6th December Booksale for Amnesty, all books £1, from 11am until 7pm at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

8th December International Day of Climate Protest, to demand that world leaders take the urgent action we need to prevent the catastrophic destabilisation of our global climate: *Climate Change Bike Ride* assembles at south side of Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, at 10am to arrive in Parliament Square at 1pm to join the *National Climate March* (assemble at Millbank, 12 noon to arrive Parliament Square 1pm) for the main march to a 2.30pm rally at the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square, see campaigncc.org

10th December Book launch of *The Anarchist Past and other essays* by Nicolas Walter at Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London, from 7pm to 8.30pm, contact info@fiveleaves.co.uk or 0115 9693597

10th December Demo against repression of Zapatista communities in Chiapas, Mexico - bring things to make a noise at 1pm outside the Mexican Embassy, 16 George Street, London W1S 1LX, see <http://ukzapatistas.wordpress.com/>

11th December Save Titmore Woods, protest outside South Downs National Park pre-inquiry meeting, Hove Town Hall, Norton Road, Hove at 1pm.

12th December *Black Flag* launch meeting, to mark the re-launch of *Black Flag* magazine, at Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London at 6.30pm - there will be a brief introduction of the history of the black flag, the magazine and the anarchist symbol itself, followed by discussion

15th December Worldfair, London's liveliest ethical market, will be at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 from 11am until 6pm, see worldfair.org.uk for more

15th December March and demo against Sequani in Ledbury - Sequani (used to be called Toxicol) are a contract testing lab in Lebury who test all sorts of products on animals - meet

12 noon at Ledbury train station car park, see [animalliberation.co.uk](http://animalliberation.co.uk)

19th December South London SolFed film night presents *Pan's Labyrinth*, a gothic fairy tale set after the Spanish revolution, 7.30pm at Café Crema, 306 New Cross Road, London SE14, £4 includes delicious veggie meal

22nd December Grand Anarchist Winter Solstice Party from 2pm at Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1

16th January South London SolFed film night presents *Devil's Backbone*, 7.30pm at Café Crema, 306 New Cross Road, London SE14, £4 includes delicious veggie meal

## The quiz

1. Where in Jerusalem is the gate called the 'Eye of the Needle' mentioned in the Bible?
2. What is Abahlali baseMjondolo?
3. What did Alphonse Bertillon pioneer?
4. What was the date of birth of the Persian Sun god Mithras?

Answers on page 6

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